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ABSTRACT

The amount of tournament competition in American forensics should be reduced and replaced with community-centered, audience-involving, service-oriented activities. Many forensics educators are distressed with the direction tournament debate has taken. It is increasingly insular, particularized, and isolated from the mainstream of campus life. Taking debate into the community can help students learn approaches appropriate to the great public forums of democracy, engender support for the activity, and strengthen the position of the Director of Forensics. Three action proposals are that: (1) participation in community-centered events be built into the national and regional system of rewards and recognitions; (2) a national program be established to formulate and disseminate approaches to community debate; and (3) directors and programs be evaluated partially on the quality and extent of community debate generated by that program. Examples of community debate formats include parliamentary debate, televised debate, classroom debate, community debates on issues on the local agenda, and debates on campus issues. (RS)

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Reaching Out Into the Community Through Forensics: Creative Approaches

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Reaching Out Into The Community Through

Forensics: Creative Approaches

As collegiate and high school forensic programs have evolved over the past fifty years, a focus on tournament competition has dominated the scene. As budgets have increased for the leaders, it has become commonplace for a collegiate forensic program to attend thirty tournament events. High schools often involve large teams of students, and the leaders travel on a national or regional circuit. Not surprisingly, the focus is on preparation for competition. In most situations, success, both for the students and the director, is defined as competitive winning. The dynamics of a program are measured by trophies won, tournaments attended, rounds completed, points earned, and distances travelled.

In many situations, the frenetic pace of competition has undesirable effects. Many coaches burn out after a few years of the pace. The resulting preponderance of young and inexperienced and sometimes immature directors leads to many problems. With the high turnover rate, institutional memory is short.

My proposal today is to reduce the amount of tournament competition in American forensics and to replace some of that activity with community-centered, audience-involving, service-oriented activities. Such a shift would challenge the creativity of debaters and directors. It would reduce the amount of travel. It would save or redirect money. It would provide programs with local exposure resulting in increased support and appreciation. In turn, this orientation would probably attract more students.

Because public debate involves speech techniques very different from the norms of tournament debate. Students could identify with the style. They would understand the eventual benefits derived from participation. The current approach requires considerable attitude adjustment for students contemplating participation. While some students adapt to the "rules of the game," still others decline the invitation. They see little benefit from learning the idiosyncratic delivery and tactical approaches now normative in tournament debate.

History of the Problem

Public debates have been preached by forensic leaders since debate began in America. Many directors have romantically identified with those debates at the turn of the century. A team of perhaps of four debaters and a retinue of supporters were met at the train, taken to a large hall on campus, and engaged in a public debate before a large and enthusiastic audience. It was a singular event; it was covered by the press; and it captured the attention of students. They would spend a month or more getting ready for that special evening.

Tournament debate emerged in the late 1930's and its advantages were obvious. The cliche, "more bang for the buck" is apropos. Of course, in earlier times, a single tournament would occupy students' preparation for a month or so. Then came air travel, then bargain fares. The definition of an active national program suggested that a tournament was in order every weekend when students could get away. Final exams represented some constraint. Vacations did not.

National developmental conferences have assembled from time to time to assess and recommend sound practice for collegiate debate. A statement from the Second National Conference on Forensics, held in Evanston September 12-15, 1984, commented on tournament style debate. Coming ten years after the first national conference at Sedalia, the final report asserted the need for debate practice to follow the goals and ideals set for an educational activity:

> The first Developmental Conference, concluding that "tournament debate should be an enterprise in the comparative communication of arguments," noted that debate is not an exercise in the rapid recitation of bits of evidence, erroneously known as "information processing." Sedalia conferees condemned such practices as the presentation of material at a rate too fast for most listeners to comprehend, the tactic of deliberately presenting more pieces of information or minor points than opponents can absorb, the use of verbal shorthand that obfuscates the clarity of argument; the infrequency of explanations among evidence, inferences, and conclusions; and the relative rarity of discussions of value assumptions. It is noteworthy that the volume reporting the conference was entitled *Forensics as Communication.* Not as logic, or evidence, or gamesmanship, and certainly not as information processing --- but as communication. Now, ten years later, the Evanston conferees reaffirmed the primacy of communication in forensics, sharply criticizing tournament practices that subvert the essential character of the activity.[1]

Obviously, community debate is, in the extreme, the antithesis of tournament debate. Carried on in the public gaze, it must adapt to real world audiences. It is not protected by a culture that accepts the specialized practices decried in the Sedalia and Evanston reports. It can well serve as a natural medication for a disease of our internal system.

Today, we do not know the extent of public service, community-centered debate in and around our colleges and universities. One supposes that there is little, especially when compared to the rounds of tournament competition. If the resume's of programs applying for national and regional PKD awards are indicative, most programs complete one or two service projects a year, and they are often in the form of high school tournaments, workshops, or institutes, all of which serve and reinforce the tournament model.

The Problem

Is there a problem? Most of us here today might not think that a problem exists. We represent healthy programs with adequate budgets, well-developed traditions of institutional support, and a level of competence that assures us of competitive success. We know where the levers of power can be moved on campus. We probably engage in some public debate just because it is right to do. The tendencies noted are seldom seen as such in a program that is in full action.. But eventually, the demands of competition lead to a change of leadership and good new leadership is replaced by medeocre leadership. Another program dies.

We suffer from lack of continuity in our culture. Major graduate schools have cut off programs, thus eliminating opportunity for quality apprenticeships.

High school coaches often recruited as a function of new employment. They start as novices, take a couple of workshops, then pass their shallow, incomplete knowledge and biases around for a short period before gaining tenure and dropping out. That high school then repeats the cycle. Meanwhile, a few trained and expert coaches and programs pluck the fruits and maintain dominance by default. There is little motivation to change what amounts to a sick system.

Plan of Action

I submit three action proposals:

1. That participation in community-centered events be built into the national and regional system of rewards and recognitions.

2. That a national program be established to formulate and disseminate approaches to community debate for the information of all.

3. That directors and programs be evaluated partially on the quality and extent of community debate generated by that program.

Adding community-centered events to the national system

National rewards and recognitions come from tournament success. The impact of tournament awards on programs and directors is well known --- some directors base a large sector of their self-image on competitive success as measured by trophies and rankings. The way to generate change is to change the reward system. The degree of change should be significant. Perhaps 1/3 of the reward structure should be based on achievement in community events.

The Pi Kappa Delta National and Province gatherings feature one more tournament where students vie for trophies in debate and individual events. Much energy is devoted to making the tournaments of high quality and respect. A committee on community debate and speaking should be established by PKD (and DSR-TKA) to foster community events and thier recognition. Pi Kappa Delta now offers several special awards, presented for special recognition. Specific awards should be added to recognize achievement in community events. Tape recordings will provide a basis for judging in national competition with suitable awards presented. To make am eskplecially significant impression, a number of sweepstakes points equal of 1/3 of those available at the national tournament could be presented to programs with worthy community events. Those points could be added to the totals for national school sweepstakes awards. We would see an immediate leap by our leading schools to sponsor community events. Trophy lust wins again in its ability to motivate educational achievement.

CEDA should also offer significant points, again equal to 1/3 of the available universe of points. That is, the team winning the national sweepstakes might expect to derive 1/3 of its points from community events in order to stay competitive. In addition, community events could be singled out for recognition, even for schools not doing so well in tournament competitions. Awards for the outstanding community event measured by amount for participation, or creativity, or uniqueness, or campus impact, or community impact, or entertainment value could be recognized.

Our books of national sweepstakes records should devise a system for awarding points, factoring points into national sweepstakes, and reporting community debate in a dramatic way. Again, individual awards in the community event could be added to the book. Programs that were outstanding in community speech and debate events would thus be recognized and could use that recognition on campus to further its interests.

Each national organization should create a committee to foster the growth of community events. The committee should: 1.) set goals for its organization in community events, 2) devise and maintain a reward system, 3) monitor the effectiveness of the reward system in motivating community debate, 4) propose changes to adjust the system toward reaching of goals, 5) create mechanisms and standards for the awarding of points and awards.

A Coordinated National Effort

The committees in each organization (PKD, DSR-TKA, PRP, AFA, CEDA, NFL, National Federation, and ETC) should come together and form a national committee to stimulate and coordinate community debate. They may be eligible for national or regional grant moneys for their work. This committee might be named the National Committee for Community Debate, or NCCD.

NCCD should foster national workshops to share formats, settings, approaches, and other ideas. Then, they should disseminate their findings through workshops, convention panels, presentations at tournaments, and publications. For example, the *Forensic of Pi Kappa Delta* could feature an approach to community debate in each issue. A special editor could solicit articles from directors of successful events or articles with suggested formats.

Examples of Community Debate Formats

1. The best known format is Parliamentary Debate. Approaches are outlined in several well-known debate texts. Freeley devotes an entire chapter to the subject.[2] His earlier editions of the book give better treatment of the classic Oxford approach. The Oxford and Cambridge debate unions made this famous in Britain and there are delightful variations found at such institutions as Edinborough (with its twelve-hour marathon format) and Princeton Universities. Teams can feature well-known experts on the selected topic, faculty, and students. After a predetermined time has elapsed, and many speakers from the audience have had opportunity to participate, the house if divided. Often, shift of opinion is utilized in determining a winning side.

2. Forensic programs can consult, coach, and provide participants for televised debates. Our state is currently debating four initiatives. Our community has contests for no less than ten local offices. The local League of Women Voters called upon our program for advice on format and coaching of the program moderators. We helped develop a debate/interview/question-answer format for a twenty-minute candidate encounter and a forty-minute initiative debate between two advocates. While we were behind the scenes, we have the satisfaction of helping the public forum and instilling confidence in the League members who moderated the encounters. The programs are taped and are currently being aired over the cable public service channel.

3. Students and staff can motivate and guide debates in college, high school and elementary school classrooms. I saw a wonderful approach last summer in Israel under the guidance of the Israel Debating Society. A debate can be staged on a single proposition in about an hour involving 10 students. There are four students to a side. They consult and develop their case with whatever notice is allowed. A week is a good

preparation period. They research, develop and rehearse their speeches, and develop a sense of teamwork. There are two major and two supporting speakers. There are constructive and rebuttal speeches and some cross examination is included. All participants sit at a long table along with the student Chairperson and the timer who has a large clock and a large bell. The students are enthusiastic and serious. This format has real possibilities for a concerted effort to incorporate debate into American classrooms. College students could serve as consultants, implementing a nationally developed lesson plan. Plans should be developed for all levels.

4. A debate series could be tied to a speaker series at whatever level the institution can afford --- national, regional, expensive or low cost speakers.

5. A debate can be attached to presentation of a speaker.

6. A series of debates can be developed as a public events series for the whole year.

7. Using the national tournament resolution, the host school can present a public debate with another school in the area. The format should be adapted for audience situations and probably audience participation. A variation is to tease out a resolution based on a specific case a team is running. This could allow for a whole series of debates with one opponent school or with a series of schools.

8. A forensic program can organize community debates on issues on the local agenda --- ballot issues and candidates leap to mind. Participants can be community activists, elected leaders, faculty, and students.

9. A Hyde Park debate series can be held outdoors at noon. Members of the debate initiate debate and then allow any and all to say their piece following guidelines specified. A speakers stand, rules, and amplification may be appropriate to give a sense of locale and order.

10. If the university has theme weeks or books of the quarter, debates can be organized around the content area.

11. Debates on campus issues could include national education problems such as the Political Correctness issue or local problems such as the location of a new building project.

12. The program can publicize and operate a consulting service for departments and student groups that wish to hold debates.

13. Most universities have a speakers bureau. A set of debates can be prepared and offered on that service for community organization programs in the surrounding area.

14. A sub-group of students can be developed within the forensic program. A director of community services could be deserving of a stipend or a scholarship. That individual could lead a student group that would prepare some community events, publicize them, then operate as a sub-set of the forensic program. They may well find themselves financially self-supporting through grants, stipends, and fees.

Directors of Forensics should be evaluated, to some extent, on the quality and extent of community debate generated by the forensic program.

This idea should be promoted nationally, regionally, and locally by the Director of Forensics. If we expect the program and its director to re-energize community events, then the job description and evaluative criteria should recognize that effort. It would seem that this development should work to the marked benefit of Directors of Forensics.

All too often, directors are unappreciated. Their tournament activities take place off campus. Students rant and rave in practice rounds and are overheard through closed doors by senior communication faculty. Trophies and press releases simply do not substitute for a true sense of involvement, admiration, and mutual support that would result for more community debate. Academic colleagues, departmental and in the general University community have concepts of what debate should be. There were gained from their own high school debate experiences, from movies, and from an ideal rooted in bygone times. Stated bluntly, many forensic programs suffer from alienation from the host department and the host school. We are all familiar with apocalyptic tales of abrupt program terminations following a random visit from a random dean. On a more personal level, I am still in a quandary whether our recent hosting of CEDA nationals helped or hindered our future when seen in an on balance-analysis. While we certainly received much local publicity that the event was in town, we also caught a lot of criticism from faculty who dropped in on a round or heard a debate through a closed door. Several of my good friends in my lunch bunch have said, that approach to debate is just nuts.

Increased community debate will not address the issue of the national debating style and its educational implications. It will provide a positive image of academic debating for local consumption. It will serve as a buffer. It will allow us ability to argue that our students can and will adapt to varying rhetorical situations. When the only model heard on our campus is tournament debate, we can only hope that individual speaking events will provide an outlet for the drop-in alumnus or the roving administrator.We need and can have an alternative image of our forensic programs.

From a departmental administrator's viewpoint, the inclusion of a significant element of community debate in the overall program is of real assistance in justifying the commitment of teaching time for forensics. The cost of valuable teaching time is of real concern to administrators and faculty.

Community-centered debate provides the Director of Forensics with an outlet of abilities akin to professional or artistic performance. It is applied debate and argumentation in a community service context. All of this provides rationale for tenure, promotion, and merit awards. And all of this provides the communication department faculty with an asset with which it can identify in concert with its educational goals.

Ernest L. Boyer, President of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, has proposed a new approach to evaluation of faculty. In *Scholarship Reconsidered, Priorities of the Professoriate,*[3] he defines scholarship much more broadly than most institutions. His category of "the scholarship of application, and the category of the scholarship of teaching would certainly embrace an active program of community debate. Further, the idea of creativity contracts suggests that professors articulate a set of new goals for a period of three to five years. Their evaluation is then based on achievement of those goals. Certainly a program of enhanced community debate, together with some specificity as to the scope and nature of the effort should provide for a wonderful implementation of the Boyer concept. In fact, this concept of a new energy in community service, teaching, and application of argumentation theory provides an excellent illustration of what Dr. Boyer is suggesting for American higher education.

Some Conclusions

Many forensic educators are distressed with the direction tournament debate has taken. Some hoped that CEDA debate would cure many of the extremes of NDT approaches. They have been disappointed as CEDA succeeded nationally in attracting the majority of programs. Those programs did not bring a desire to participate in a more moderate and reasonable style of debate. Instead, they found in CEDA a new competitive arena, ripe for the strategies that served well in tournament debating in NDT and in high school debate as taught at national institutes.

We are much worse off than when the Sedalia conference first attempted to address problems of style and approach. We now have fewer major schools and fewer directors with terminal degrees and full faculty status. Debate is increasingly insular, particularized, and isolated from the main stream of campus intellectual life. Many directors find it necessary to protect debate from prying eyes and ears of departmental and institutional colleagues.

Taking debate into the community can help address some of these problems. If we define achievement and make community debate a new norm, more students will be involved in an approach to debate which responds to a much wider variety of audience than they now face. If these students debate before general students, faculty, community leaders, community group members, and members of advocacy groups, they will certainly learn to employ approaches appropriate to the great public fora of our democracy..

Taking debate into the community can engender support for the activity. Student governments, academic departments, and university administrations are asking, "what are we getting for our investment of faculty salary, teaching space, assistant time, travel expense, and student time?" Community debate can provide a highly satisfying answer in a form that can be understood by those who are interested in asking the questions.

Further, community debate activities, can strengthen the position of the Director of Forensics. Today, that individual has only a cadre of students, some trophies, and many bars of soap. (if the program stays in better places, little bottles of hand lotion are added prizes. But, at tenure or promotion time, that director needs tangible evidence accomplishment and teaching effectiveness. Colleagues can participate in and witness local events and can attest to their quality and value.

Furthermore, if the reward systems such as national sweepstakes recognize accomplishment in community debate, a director would have reason to spend less time on the road and more on campus working among colleagues. What a nice thought.

Implementation of these ideas follows two lines. At the local level, directors can simply set a goal for their program and carry it out. Perhaps one public event per quarter would be a good takeoff point. But without national recognition, this will be, to translate an old Latin expression, a fart in the wind. What is needed is national support and reward. At the national level, our organizations need to start action by creating committees to define a role for community debate in the reward structure. The component of community debate needs to be significant. (We all know whats that means.)

This proposal is no panacea. , It has merit in its own right, even if one school adopts some of its suggestions. Beyond that, however, it can make an incremental contribution to making debate a better activity.

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